

Government Orders

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to participate in the debate on Bill C-52. I suppose when you are looking at legislation and who benefits from the legislation you should send a very clear message. Those people whose incomes are in excess of \$85,000 a year and those people who have \$10,000, \$12,000 or \$15,000 cash at the end of the year to set aside for whatever reason ought to be very happy with this government at this point because this legislation is tailored for all of those people whose incomes are in excess of \$85,000 or those people who have \$10,000 to \$15,000 cash lying around at the end of the year to invest in some way.

We are talking about a very select group of Canadians. This legislation is aimed at probably less than 1 per cent of Canadians. The government plans that in its concerns with everything happening in Canada, we now should spend some weeks in the House of Commons debating how to assist those in the upper-income brackets whose incomes are \$85,000 and more.

This is occurring at a time when in excess of 1 million people are living in poverty and nearly 1 million people are jobless. There is also an unquestionable crisis in Atlantic Canada and a farm bankruptcy crisis throughout the whole country, particularly in western Canada. There is also a collapsing west coast fishing industry and there are plant closures in all parts of the country, particularly in the industrial heartland of Canada.

In spite of all these issues that are crucial, which in some cases we have all agreed are actually in a crisis situation, the government says it wants to spend some time and help those people who need special assistance, those whose incomes are in excess of \$85,000 per year. It reminds us of what the Conservative government's agenda is all about.

We do not spend any time talking about the forest industry. With all due respect to my friend, the minister of forests, who is in the House today and is very concerned about forestry, his cabinet colleagues may not share his same devotion and interest. Do we talk about forestry and the concerns of forestry? No. Do we talk about the concerns of the mining industry? No. Do we talk about the crisis in agriculture? No. Do we talk about the crisis in our export trade? No. Do we talk about the plight being faced by native peoples? No.

We do not talk about the issues facing this country. We are going to talk about assisting those people whose incomes are in excess of \$85,000 a year, as if they needed any help. This is absolutely incredible and very embarrassing. I do not know how there are any government members sitting here today who are not just running out and having a cup of coffee to get of here so they do not have to listen to this. How can they seriously proceed here knowing what is going on? Let me get into some details.

Let me first make a slight comment about this legislation that is going to assist the wealthy in the country.

In 1982, the Liberal government carried out a task force on pension reform. It was very critical, very important and was done very seriously. It went across the country, had input and came up with a reasonable report, up to a point. We had to submit, of course, a usual minority statement because there were many parts of it that we did not agree with. The one part we did not agree with most emphatically is what we are dealing with today.

The report suggested that the government introduce legislation as it has done today. But the government has switched from being Liberals to Tories.

In the budget of 1984 introduced by the finance minister of the day, Marc Lalonde, he introduced legislation at that time which is exactly the same as the legislation we are debating today. Perhaps the Liberal mindset has changed since 1984. Perhaps the Liberal view of pension reform has changed. When listening to some of the speeches yesterday, that is one conclusion that I must draw. I can draw others but let us forget that. It is history now. It looks like the Liberals have changed their tune and are also now concerned with what this is going to do in terms of being unprogressive legislation in this country.

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This is an appropriate time to deal with so-called pension reform because we all recognize that the population of Canada is aging, that there are problems in terms of people having adequate incomes in their retirement years. We recognize that many senior citizens in this country find themselves living in poverty, in many cases very serious situations of poverty, particularly elderly single women of which there are literally hundreds of thousands living in poverty. Yet this legisla-